

LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATIONAL IMPLICATIONS IN VIRTUAL WORK ENVIRONMENT

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ABSTRACT

Due to pandemic, there has been a dramatic change in the composition of the industry, the profession, the way people work, and the way they conduct business. This Research will discuss the concept of virtual organization and any change in the role, responsibilities, and processes of leaders/ line managers/ Human resource department in these organizations. Companies operate worldwide. Small and medium sized companies living in the same country still rely on international suppliers and markets, among other things. As technology advances, develops, and expands, global trade will become more prominent in all companies. Considering this technological process, virtual work from home pattern formation is likely to be very common. This research will also discuss which leadership styles/ competencies are prevalent and how they can be implemented and implemented effectively in a virtual platform environment. From a practical point of view, employee involvement will be investigated, especially in terms of how it operates under a “real” environment. Virtual organizations are well suited for global trade and international perspective will also be addressed. Finally, suggestions and recommendations will be made to help corporate companies empower employee engagement.

KEYWORDS: *Environment, Organizational Implications & Leadership*

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1. INTRODUCTION

A. Statement of the Problem

The virtual working environment has changed entirely the work and team dynamics and the working/ communication pattern, it brings some problems/ challenges too which is explained below

Problem/ Issue	Problem Description	Cause	Effect
Lack of good communication	Not be able to communication face-to-face, with your virtual staff, it can be difficult to convey messages	Cultural differences and time spatial differences between virtual workers. Additionally, the visual cues and physical gestures that you receive through personal contact are not available	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High levels of stress • Dissatisfied customers • Conflict between co-workers • Failure to achieve goals
Decreased concentration and productivity	Difficult to concentrate as home is full of distraction	Who are not accustomed to working remotely may not feel truly at work. After all, most people do not even mix their homes and work	Employees may not achieve the same focus and productivity as they do in the office.
Difficult to manage staff and maintain accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If your virtual employees really work? • If they charge you for working hours (hours when they are not working)? • If they are disruptive 	Difficult to keep track of accountability	Affect employee performance.

	websites during working hours?		
Complex work management	Traditionally, teams plan and review project progress through personal meetings and discussions. However, that is not possible in virtual groups	Since remote groups often operate at different times, it may be difficult to combine and held regular group meetings	May not be able to articulate your point as effectively as an internal meeting can.
Difficult to maintain a team relationship	Virtual employees often miss an important part of office life - socializing.	Since group members do not cooperate with their colleagues, it may result in a lack of team spirit. This, in turn, can lead to a lack of trust and confidence in the staff.	They miss the banter, conversations and discussions of the watercooler that many in the office enjoy. Since group members do not cooperate with their colleagues, it may result in a lack of team spirit. This, in turn, can lead to a lack of trust and confidence in the staff.

In the research, we will try to find out how the Line managers and leaders are addressing these issues in work place and what initiatives Managers/ Leaders and even Human resource department taking to avoid these issues/ challenges and maintains a motivating working environment

B. Objective of the Study

- **Objective1:** To identify whether the virtual work environment/ pattern enhanced/reduced the work quality
- **Objective 2:** To identify what motivation technique or engagement initiatives Line managers/ leaders are taking to make the geographically dispersed team bonded
- **Objective 3:** What is the role of HR department here

2. TECHNICAL/ POETIC CONTENT

2.1 Method

a. Research Questions

To understand the how today's business line managers and leaders coping with the new virtual work environment and whether they have changed their leadership styles and according to them which leadership styles are most significant, a study has been conducted.

During the study, the below questions were asked to a target audience who works in virtual working environment

- What are the leadership styles most prevalent and accessible to effectively manage virtual teams?
- What motivation techniques have you applied to engage the geographically dispersed members and why did they work or not work?
- What engagement initiative did you implement to facilitate the binding of your team members in the virtual work environment? Did they work and why did they work and if not, why not?

- Does Virtual work have any effect on employee turnover? Why?
- What components, tasks or activities of your work environment were changed or transformed while the shift happened to complete online?
- Did your roles and responsibilities change during virtual work?
- What support did you get from the HR department to increase productivity because of the new way of working where it was completely virtual?

b. Study Design

The Research design is a framework for planning your study/ Research and answering your Research questions. Creating a study design means making decisions about:

- The type of data you need
- The participants and sources of the data i.e. sample
- The methods for collecting and analyzing data
- Measures that have been taken for the data collection and analysis
- The analysis plan with the data collected

This design sets the parameters of your Research: it determines exactly what will and will not be included. It also defines the criteria by which you will evaluate your results and draw your conclusions. The reliability and validity of your study depends on how you collect measure, analyze, and interpret your data.

i. Type of Data

As this topic chosen for the Research is very contemporary and as a Research, to go deep dive into people's mind and psychology to understand their current mental state, no **secondary data** (e.g., in national statistics, official records archives, publications, and previous studies) was used for the study, instead **primary data** (e.g., through surveys, interviews, or experiments) **was used** and then analyzed.

This made my Research more original, but it required more time and effort, and relies on participants being available and accessible.

As my Research objectives involve some part of describing subjective experiences, interpreting meanings, and understanding experiences, **qualitative data was used**.

ii. Sample

There are different types of sample designs based on two factors viz., the representation basis and the element selection technique. On the representation basis, the sample may be probability sampling or it may be non-probability sampling. Probability sampling is based on the concept of random selection, whereas non-probability sampling is 'non-random' sampling. On element selection basis, the sample may be either unrestricted or restricted. When each sample element is drawn individually from the population at large, then the sample so drawn is known as 'unrestricted sample', whereas all other forms of sampling are covered under the term 'restricted sampling'.

As the research is based on inputs from Line Manager/ Leaders of the organization which is intended to work on virtual environment as a company mandate, so the sample was restricted to limited or restricted to those areas only

Non-probability sampling was used as our sampling procedure which does not afford any basis for estimating the probability that each item in the population has of being included in the sample.

Also, the cluster of companies which are in Virtual work environment were targeted, mainly the IT companies which still working in virtual work environment largely, so the sample is “**Cluster Sample**” too

iii. Methods

As the research is trying to describe any impact of virtual working in line manager/ leader responsibilities and how they are trying to motivate and enhance the productivity remotely, so this is a “**Descriptive type**” Research. Any relationship between variables etc weren’t established.

The essence of survey method can be explained as “questioning individuals on a topic or topics and then describing their responses”. In this Research survey method of primary data collection is used in order to test the Research concepts, reflect attitude of people towards the situation.

Survey method used as **qualitative studies**.

From the viewpoint of practicality, the most popular variations of surveys include questionnaires,

Interviews and documentation review

As the target population was dispersed in different geographies, advantage of technology was taken and the questionnaire was sent through Email and WhatsApp

So, the method selected was “**Verbal interview and Survey Questionnaire**”

Purpose: Conducted in order to gather large size of information in a short period of time

Advantage:

- Members of the sample group can remain anonymous
- Considerably cheaper than most of the other primary data collection methods
- Possibility of generating genuine data

Questionnaire built in Google Forms (View below link to check the Survey Questions)

<https://forms.gle/B9n2TfLzsrzRDpTe7>

Channel: Email and WhatsApp sharing the link of the questionnaire and direct interviews of Line Managers and sometime their subordinates

b. Participants and Source

Participants are mainly clustered into IT sector, where the working pattern is still Virtual, mainly they are

- Mid Management Line Managers
- Senior Management Line Managers

- Business/ SBU Heads
- Human resource Leads

The survey result and the interview results are hereunder attached



Survey Output
V1.0.xlsx

C. Assumptions and Limitations

Assumptions

- The company works in the virtual environment
- The employees are physically distanced though located and office in same city or country
- The Manager or business leaders and even HR also don't have any interaction physically with the employees
- The whole work, meeting is done virtually either through office software like WebEx, Microsoft Teams or Google platforms like Google Meet etc.

Limitation

- The Research study is not included the other form of work pattern other than virtual work environment

2.2 Analysis and Findings

2.2.1 Leadership in the Context of Virtual or Remote Working

The term E-leadership was to begin with coined in reaction to the unused working environment where human intelligence are interceded by data and communication innovation.

The move to a worldwide economy has required changes in organization and critical adjustment on the portion of administration, alongside a modern administration approach.

E-Leaderships seen as reaction and arrangement to worldwide changes required by innovative advancement. E-leadership may moreover be a result of change in economy. These changes are making virtual and adaptable work alternatives, and they proceed to advance requiring managers to formalize their virtual work approaches and way better oversee their virtual workforces. Innovations in data and communication innovation, such as the web and e-commerce, have revolutionized the way organizations work nowadays. Subsequently, modern shapes of organizations (e-business or virtual organizations) and a present day, modern authority shape (e-leadership or virtual leadership) are taking part in this advancing business environment.

During the interview the most prevalent leadership characteristics that has come up are below

- Motivational & caring,
- Approachable, Hands-on leadership style with transparent communication
- Effective and on time communication

- Facilitation, Servant leadership
- Leadership by example
- Clarity in communication
- Facilitation, Motivation
- Collaborative
- Patience
- Timely connect & Feedback sharing
- Regular touch bases with team to check on progress and articulation of objectives clearly.
- The essential Competencies that came up from the interviewees and which are very important for the leaders who work in virtual work environment are:
- Defining the relationship between the information and the suitable technology
- The awareness of technologies and techniques that are central to maintain the flow of the data and information during virtual operation
- The great determination of when and how to replace traditional work processes by the virtual ones
- The ability to calculate the value of e technologies
- The ability to recognize and encourage creativity and technological innovation
- Competence is to experiment with ideas that he should not be hesitant in experimenting with their ideas and their applications. Regarding the core competencies for E- leadership
- The human relations skills
- Helps his/her followers in resolving conflicts
- Enables open and honest discussion
- Motivates the followers
- Builds team spirit and gives recognition

The interviews also threw some light on what behavioral factors are to be maintained/ sustained and important for the leaders who work in virtual work environment are:

- Communicating with subordinates
- Managing information resources
- Communicating with stakeholders outside the organization
- Facilitating discussion
- Active listening

- Empowering
- Delegation

2.2.2 Engagement and Effectiveness Initiatives by Leadership and Line Managers

During the interview we have discussed the impact of virtual work in employee effectiveness and we got some mixed reactions as below, based on the responses and literature reviews we have come up with our analysis

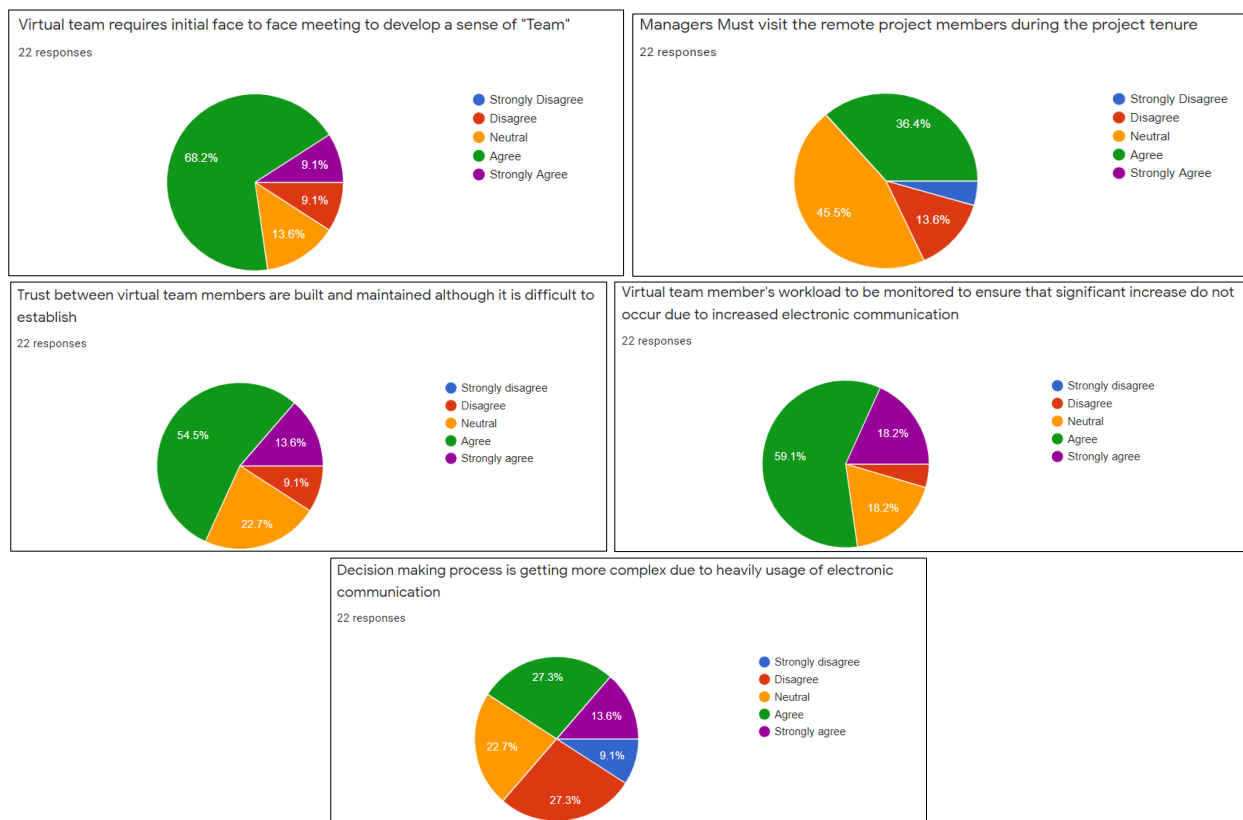


Figure 1

Those who have a willingness to be engaged are essentially self-motivated. An important aspect of this viewpoint is that engaged employees value their work and find meaning in it. They are active on the job, and they are focused on their goals.

It is essential for a company to establish positive employee experiences through consistent communication, decision-making, and treatment of employees. It is also crucial to understand and value diversity.

Overall, a virtual organization may face more challenges in creating an employee experience that is as good as that of a traditional company. No matter what, companies should strive to embrace and implement conditions and practices that reflect the values of a virtual organization.

Employees must first be engaged, which in turn generates support, which then leads to commitment if all goes well. Engagement should be viewed as what employees do to actively contribute to the success of the organization.

According to the interviews and views taken from different leaders and managers the below essential elements are to be considered for effective employee engagement in virtual work environment

They are:

- Career development 2. Effective management of talent 3. Leadership Clarity of company values, policies, and practices 4. Respectful treatment of employees 5. Company's standards of ethical behaviors 6. Empowerment 7. Fair treatment 8. Performance appraisal 9. Pay and benefit 10. Health and safety 11. Satisfaction 12. Family friendliness 13. Talent recognition 14. Communication 15. Nature of job 16. Organization politics 17. Emotional factors 18. Productivity; and 19. Personality factors
- As per the interview findings and discussion outcome:
- the effectiveness has increased due to flexibility, front ending needs have lowered proving the age old paradigm of the latter being a must for effectiveness to rethink
- Effectively spending time of full working hours, as work from home can increase the time to work and availability.
- This also depends on the maturity of the team. In Agile scrum setup the teams have collaborated and performed as per expectations. The teams that lack sense of ownership saw decrease in effectiveness.

2.2.3 Motivation and Engagement Initiatives by Line Manager

The work from home or remote work also comes with lot of bore dome and mental fatigue, as associates are not habituated of working remotely for so long. So it is line manager/ leadership's or even HR's responsibility to keep the team motivated and engaged

During the study, various line manager/ leaders were interviewed on how they were keeping the team engaged or motivated during this tough time, and below are some of the initiatives normally they take:

- Building team cohesion by Virtual team events
- Reward and Recognition
- Virtual lunch /dinner/coffee meets
- Online ordering of goodies
- Always insist team to be in video Face to face calls, so that they can see each other and not on audio and only face icon is seen
- Team building activity group task on Miro Board
- Give time off and family time, and insist the team to take up the vacations he/ she is eligible

During the interview we have asked the Leadership and Line Manager Interviewees about their perception about the engagement and motivation initiatives on the employees during the pandemic and remote working, and here are some of the findings

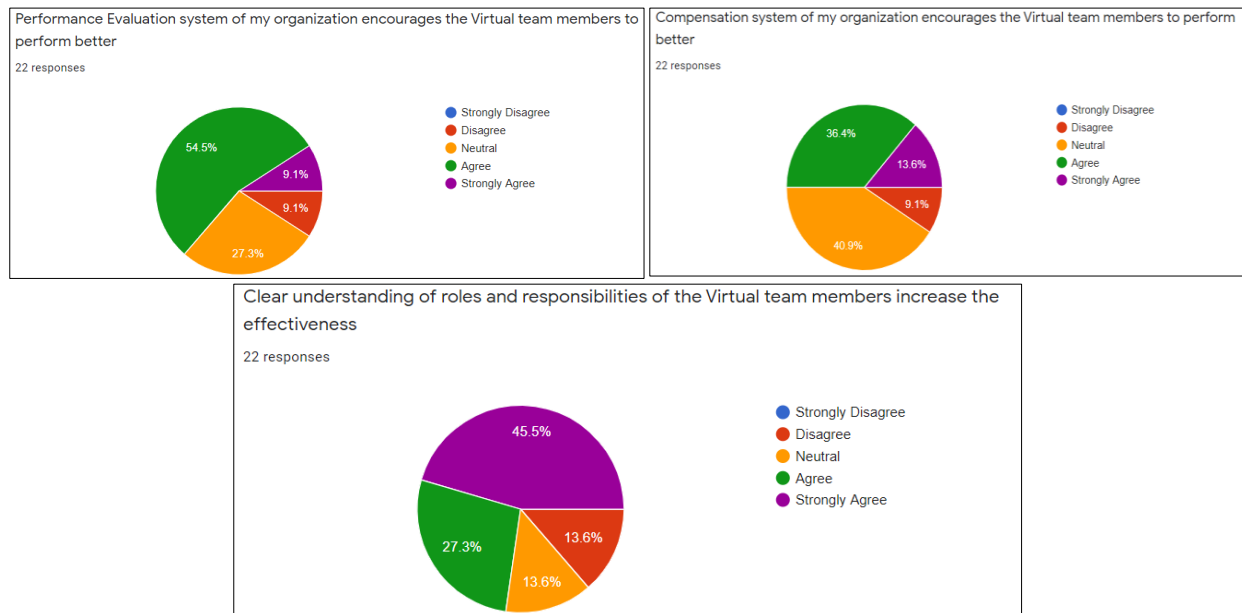


Figure 2

2.2.4 Initiatives by Human Resources

As far as technology is concerned, HR's role is not to guide remote workers, but to work with the IT team to develop strategic priorities for the devices, software, and connectivity they use.

IT priorities like data security and team collaboration are balanced with HR concerns such as usability, efficiency and conveniences.

Human resource department's work itself became challenging as remote work there is no human touch and less feelings as everything works virtually, In this scenario HR has to do onboarding to exit everything virtually which itself is challenging.

During the study, some company HR personnel who are working continuously in virtual environment since the pandemic has started were interviewed, and below are some initiatives they took to encourage and engage employees:

- Health care in pandemic by organizing vaccination drive
- The virtual connects through Town halls
- Reward and Recognition
- Flexibility in using the work from home option with relevant policies as earlier it was project specific.
- Consideration for the infrastructure needs to enable internet and back up capabilities at home
- Few virtual games can be arranged by HR to engage to divert boring atmosphere
- Celebrations of festive days virtually
- Home office set up for the new joiners

2.3 Alignment of the Objectives and Problems with the Analysis

The Problems described on the beginning of the Research are

Problem	Mitigation came up from Research Study
Lack of good communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The virtual connects through Town halls • Always insist team to be in video Face to face calls, so that they can see each other and not on audio and only face icon is seen
Decreased concentration and productivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivating the employees by Reward and recognition on regular interval • Give time off and family time, and insist the team to take up the vacations he/ she is eligible
Difficult to manage staff and maintain accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close follow up on the tasks and clear communication on the expectations
Complex work management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexibility in using the work from home option with relevant policies as earlier it was project specific. • Consideration for the infrastructure needs to enable internet and back up capabilities at home • Home office set up for the new joiners
Difficult to maintain a team relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building team cohesion by Virtual team events • Virtual lunch /dinner/coffee meets • Team building activity group task on Miro Board • Celebrations of festive days virtually

These all problems are well established during the Research analysis and also, we explained those issues by chart from the interview responses

The Research also done based on some pre-set objectives and below trying to establish that the objectives are met during the Research study

Objective1: To identify whether the virtual work environment/ pattern enhanced/reduced the work quality – **Section 4.2.2** of the Research explained the observations of the Managers/ Leaders on the effectiveness of Virtual remote work on work quality. The virtual work environment is imposed to us by external factors, so definitely answering this in one word is impossible and we also got mixed reactions from the interviewee. Obviously, the new working pattern adjustment took a while to establish, but slowly as it is going on for almost 2 years, companies and the associates both made up their mind to work on this environment. As movements are limited in remote work pattern, so the section 5b also tells us what are the areas to look on by leadership and managers to keep the associates engaged and make their work or effective. So, the Research study establishes this objective.

Objective 2: To identify what motivation technique or engagement initiatives Line managers/ leaders are taking to make the geographically dispersed team bonded

Section 4.2.3 clearly explains initiatives taken by Line Managers and Leaders to keep the geographically dispersed team connected and motivated. These observations are taken from the survey (See the Artifact excel) and some verbal interview with Some Manager and their subordinates. So, the Research study establishes this objective.

Objective 3: What is the role of HR department here **Section 4.2.4** clearly explains the role of Human Resource department and how strategically they can help the Line Managers as well as Associates to keep them engaged

motivated and effective in workplace though they don't have any human touch and work completely virtual. So, the Research study establishes this objective.

3. CONCLUSIONS

The Research discusses the concept of virtual organizations and the roles, responsibilities, and practices of their leaders/line managers. Many corporations operate globally. Even small and medium-sized companies within a single country still depend on international suppliers and markets.

Globalization will become more pronounced as technology improves, develops, and advances.

Virtual structures will likely become more prevalent as a result of this technological trend.

When assigned to work in a virtual environment, employees may experience some form of workplace isolation compared to those in traditional office settings or facilities with physical structures as their center of operations. A virtual worker will have no breakroom, cafeteria, or chance to visit a coworker in an adjacent cubicle. The traditional social aspects of a workplace will be missing. There will be no good-natured discussions about the FIFA World Cup tournament or the IPL Cricket.

In general, virtual organizations are made up of teams or individuals who work in separate locals with some degree of autonomy. A company's success can undoubtedly be aided by virtual groups. However, when typical levels of participation erode, issues with effective leadership may occur, and employees may become disenfranchised.

In a virtual firm with virtual leaders, lower employee engagement raises concerns about employee well-being. It's vital that employees in virtual businesses have the same level of meaningful involvement as their counterparts in traditional firms with physical offices and structures. In a virtual environment, employee well-being cannot be compromised. What impact does a reduction in engagement opportunities have on employees? What can be done to keep people engaged? These issues were discussed in this Research and should be discussed at work.

This Research looked at leadership paradigms and how useful and effective they may be in a virtual environment. Employee engagement was investigated from a performance aspect, with a focus on how it works in a "virtual" environment. Finally, comments and recommendations were made to assist virtual organizations in re-engaging their employees.

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